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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 INR-07 L-03
ACDA-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 PRS-01 SP-02 USIA-06
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AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL ADANA
AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
AMCONSUL IZMIR
USMISSION NATO
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ANKARA 3990

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, TU
SUBJ: STRENGTHS ANDWEAKNESSES OF THE MAJOR CANDIDATES

REF: ANKARA 3802 (DTG 171400Z MAY 77)

1. IN THE ABSENCE OF RELIABLE OPINION MEASURMENT, MOST TURKISH ELECTION ANALYSTS AND FORECASTERS BASE THEIR PREDICTIONS ON THEIR ASSESSMENTS OF THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PARTIES AND THEIR LEADERS. THIS TELEGRAM CATALGOS THE MAJOR POLITICAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE LEADERS OF TURKEY'S THREE LARGEST PARTIES--BULENT ECEVIT OF THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (RPP), SULEYMAN DEMIREL OF THE JUSTICE PARTY (JP) AND NECMETTIN ERBAKAN OF THE NATIONAL SALVATION PARTY (NSP).
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2. ECEVIT

A. STRENGTHS: ECEVIT IS AN EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG CAMPAIGNER WITH ALMOST CHARISMATIC PERSONAL CHARM,AN ATTRACTIVE PRESENCE, OUTSTANDING ORATORICAL ABILITY AND THE CAPACITY TO PROJECT VIGOR AND ENTHUSIASM. UNDER HIS LEADER-

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SHIP THE RPP, WHICH HAD NOT WON AN ELECTION SINCE IT LOST ITS SINGLE PARTY STATUS IN 1948 (EXCEPT FOR A SMALL PLURALITY IN 1961 AFTER THE MILITARY INTERVENTION WHICH HAD DESTROYED EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION), WON A PLURALITY IN 1973 AND, IN THE 1975 SENATORIAL ELECTIONS LED ALL THE OTHER PARTIES WITH 43.4 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. ECEVIT STANDS FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM AND REPRESENTS THE PROMISE OF CHANGE ALONG GENERALLY SOCIALIST LINES. HE HAS MOVED THE RPP TOWARD A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PROGRAM WHICH SEEMS PARTICULARLY APPEALING IN URBAN AREAS AND AMONG YOUTH AND INTELLECTUALS. BECAUSE OF THE RPP'S IDENTIFICATION WITH ATATURK, IT ALSO HAS A STRONG CLAIM TO THE SUPPORT OF THE BULK OF THE MILITARY AND CIVIL SERVICE. ECEVIT'S PERSONAL STANDING IN THE COUNTRY WAS ENORMOUSLY STRENGTHENED BY HIS DECISION TO INTERVENE IN CYPRUS IN 1974. ALSO WHILE HE WAS PRIME MINISTER, HE WORKED TO IMPROVE HIS POSITION WITH THE RURAL VOTERS BY HIS COMMODITY SUPPORT PRICING POLICY AND BY HIS DECISION TO RESUME--UNDER STRICT CONTROLS--THE CULTIVATION OF OPIUM POPPIES. HIS PARTY, ALTHOUGH TROBLED BY FACTIONALISM, SUPPORTS HIM ENTHUSIASTICALLY AND SEEMS TO BE THE BEST FUNCTIONING OF ALL TURKISH PARTIES.

B. WEAKNESSES: ECEVIT IS CLEARLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE LEFT IN GENERAL, WITH A PARTY THAT MANY VILLAGERS DETEST ON THE BASIS OF ITS QUASI-DICTATORIAL RUEL DURING THE ONE PARTY ERA AND WITH SECULARISM. IN THE COMPETITION FOR THE ANTI-COMMUNIST, RELIGIOUS-MINDED RURAL VOTERS, ECEVIT'S OPPONENTS ARE EXPLOITING THESE ASSOSCIATIONS. ECEVIT'S RESPONSE IS THAT HIS PARTY IS THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST BOTH
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COMMUNISM AND FASCISM, THAT IT IS COMMITTED TO DEMOCRACY AT ALL LEVELS AND THAT IT IS NOT ANTI-RELIGIOUS. IN SUPPORT OF THE LAST POINT, ECEVIT HAS PLACED A FORMER DIRECTOR OF REGLIGIOUS AFFAIRS AS AN RPP CANDIDATE FOR THE SENATE. ECEVIT MAY ALSO BE SOMEHAT WEAKENED BY HIS REPUTATION FOR TAKING A VISIONARY APPROACH TOWARD ECONOMIC ISSUES, BY THE FACT THAT HIS CYPRUS INTERVENTION IS FADING INTO HISTORY, AND BY THE FACT THAT HE HAS BEEN OUT OF POWER SINCE THE FALL OF 1974.

3. DEMIREL

A. STRENGTHS: DEMIREL WON LARGE MAJORITIES IN 1965 AND 1969. HIS FALL TO SECOND PLACE IN 1973 IS WIDELY ATTRIBUTED TO THE LOSS OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN HIM FOLLOWING THE 1971 COUP BY MEMORANDUM AGAINST HIM. DEMIREL BEGAN HSI COMBACK WITH THE FORMATION OF HIS CURRENT COALITION IN APRIL 1975. BY KEEPING HIS SHAKY COALITION TOGETHER FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, HE HAS ACHIEVED HIS GOAL OF STAYING IN POWER UNTIL ELECTIONS. HE HAS NEUTRALIZED THE GROUP OF

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REBELS WHO SPLIT FROM HIS PARTY IN 1970 AND FORMED THE
DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND AT THE SAME TIME HAS ABSORBED THE
OLD DEMOCRAT PARTY OF THE LATE ADNAN MENDERES. HE, LIKE
ECEVIT, HAS MAINTAINED HIGH COMMODITY PRICE SUPPORTS AND
GONE ALONG WITH SUBSTANTIAL WAGE INCREASES. HE HAS CARRIED ON
A VERY CAUTIOUS FOREIGN POLICY, WHICH FOR ALL ITS SHORTCOMINGS,
HAS PLACED HIM IN A VERY STRONG POSITION VIS-A-VIS DOMESTIC
CRITICS. AN INDICATION OF HIS SUCCESS MAY BE THAT HIS PARTY'S
PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE ROSE FROM 29.8 IN 1973 TO 40.8 IN 1975.
DEMIREL'S GREATEST ASSET IS HIS APPARENT ABILITY TO EMPATHIZE
WITH TURKEY'S RURAL MAJORITY. DEMIREL IS A PRODUCT OF RURAL
TURKEY WHO HAS DONE WELL, A LIVING EXAMPLE OF WHAT OTHERS
CAN ASPIRE TO. HE CONSCIOUSLY EXPLOITS HIS RURAL HERITAGE
IN PURSUIT OF THE PEASANT VOTE. AT THE SAME TIME HE IS
RECOGNIZED AS AN INTELLIGENT AND CAPABLE POLITICAL LEADER.
HIS CONTROL OVER THE JUSITICE PARTY IS, AT THIS MOMENT,
VIRTUALLY UNCHALLENGED DESPITE FINANCIAL SCANDALS ASSOCIATED WITH
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HIS FAMILY AND THE MILITARY INTERVENTION AGAINST HIM IN 1971. DEMIREL
DOES NOT SHARE ECEVIT'S CAPACITY TO EVOKE EXCITING VISIONS OF A
NEW, MORE EQUITABLE TURKISH SOCITY. (IN CONTRAST WITH
THR RPP SOLOGAN "OUR HOPE IS ECEVIT", JP SUPPORTERS ABOUT
"NATIONALIST DEMIREL" OR "BUILDER DEMIREL".) HIS
POLITICAL PHILOSPHY--AND THE IMAGE HE SEEMINGLY
CONSCIOUSLY PROJECTS--IS THAT OF A LIBERAL NATIONAL LEADER
OF THE 1950'S. WHILE MANY URBAN VOTERS CONSIDER HIM AN
ANACHRONISM, THE RURAL VOTER MAY BE REASSURED BY DEMIREL'S
ADHERENCE TO TRADITIONAL IDEAS AND METHODS.

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INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 INR-07 L-03
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INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
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B. WEAKNESSES: DEMIREL'S MOST SERIOUS WEAKNESS
AT THIS POINT IN THE CAMPAIGN IS THE APPARENT INABILITY OF
THE GOVERNMENT HE HEADS TO BRING THE DOMESTIC SECURITY
SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. THE TRAGEDY OF CONTINUING VIOLENCE WOULD
BE A SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEM FOR ANY GOVERNMENT, BUT IT
IS PARTICULARLY SO IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT TURKISH HISTORY.
THE CATALYST FOR THE MILITARY INTERVENTIONS OF 1960 AND 1971
WAS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. ANOTHER LIABILITY, WHICH IS ALSO
AGGRAVATED BY RECENT TURZHUSPGITORY, IS A RAPIDLY
DETERIORATING ECONOMIC SITUATION. THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE
CRISIS NOW FACING THE DEMIREL GOVERNMENT IS REMINISCENT
OF THE ONE FACED BY MENDERES NINETEEN YEARS AGO. FROM THE
POINT OF VIEW OF THE AVERAGE VOTER, HOWEVER, THE DRAMATIC
INFLATION WHICH TURKEY HAS EXPERIENCED DURING THE LAST FEW
YEARS MAY BE EVEN MORE DAMAGING TO DEMIREL.
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4. ERBAKAN

A. STRENGTHS: ERBAKAN MADE HIS PARTY'S
THIRD LARGEST IN 1973, LARGELY AT THE JP'S EXPENSE. HIS
SINGLE GREATEST STRENGTH IS HIS CLEAR IDENTIFICATION WITH
THE RELIGIOUS REACTIONARY ELEMENTS OF TURKISH SOCIETY WHICH
HAVE NEVER ACCEPTED THE SECULAR REFORMS OF ATATURK. BY
CHALLENGING (INCREASINGLY OPENLY) NOT ONLY THE SECULAR
REFORMS BUT ALSO THE WESTERNIZING, MODERNIZING REFORMS OF
ATATURK, ERBAKAN HAS MADE HIMSZUDLRAQMOIOUS CONSERVATIVES AND OTHERS
WHO HAVE GROWN
DISENCHANGED WITH TURKEY'S EFFORTS TO BECOME A WESTERN
COUNTRY. ERBAKAN'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY SEEMS TO BE AN
UNCERTAIN BLEND OF POPULISM, NATIONALISM AND FANTASY. ITS
APPEAL IS TO THE UNSOPHISTICATED, AND A SIZEABLE PROPORTION
OF THE TURKISH PUBLIC REMAINS POLITICALLY UNSOPHISTICATED.
ERBAKAN HAS USED HIS PARTICIPATION IN BOTH THE ECEVIT AND
THE DEMIREL GOVERNMENTS TO ESTABLISH HIS PARTY AS A FACTOR
TO BE RECKONED WITH. HE HAS BEEN EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL IN

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GAINING PATRONAGE BENEFITS FOR HIS SUPPORTERS. OF PARTICULAR NOTE HAS BEEN HIS SUCCESS IN PALCING NSP FOLLOWERS IN HIGH JOBS IN THE STATE ECONOMIC ENTERPRISES AND IN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES. AT THE SAME TIME, ERBAKAN HAS BUILT PARTY FINANCES TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THE NSP IS SAID TO HAVE THE LARGEST CAMPAIGN FUND OF ALL TURKISH PARTIES. HE HAS ALSO MADE A STRONG BID FOR VOTER SUPPORT BY LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONES OF INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS ALL OVER TURKEY.

B. WEAKNESSES: MORE THAN WITH MOST POLITICIANS, ERBAKAN'S STRENGTHS ARE ALSO HIS WEAKNESSES. HIS RELIGIOUS REACTION IS ANATHEMA TO MOST MODERN, EDUCATED TURKS. HIS SEEMINGLY FANTASTIC INDUSTRIALIZATION SCHEMES ARE THE OBJECT OF SCORN AND HE IS CONSIDERED BY MANY OF HIS CRITICS TO BE A CHARLATAN PLAYING ON THE IGNORANCE OF THE TURKISH PEASANT. ONE FURTHER WEAKNESS IS THE UNCERTAIN QUALITY OF THE
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COALITION OF FUNDAMENTALIST RELIGIOUS GROUPINGS THAT FORM THE CORE OF THE NSP. DURING THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN AN APPARENT FALLING OUT BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR SECTS WITH THE CONSEQUENT PURGE AND RESIGATION OF SEVERAL PROMINENT PARTY MEMBERS. ERBAKAN MAY ALSO BE DAMAGED BY RECENT PRESS REPORTS OF A SCANDAL INVOLVING HIS BROTHER IN INFLUENCE-PEDDLING.

5. EACH OF THESE LEADERS APPEALS UNIQUELY TO AN IDENTIFIABLE SECTOR OF TURKISH SOCIETY. AT THIS POINT, DEMIREL APPEARS TO CONTINUE TO CONTROL THE CENTER WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF PICKING UP OR LOSING VOTES ON EITHER THE LEFT OR RIGHT. ECEVIT BELIEVES HIMSELF TO BE RIDING THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE (URBANIZATION AND INCREASING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG RURAL VOTERS), AND THE 1973 AND 1975 ELECITONS PROVIDED SOME SUPPORT FOR THIS BELIEF. HOWEVER, THOSE ELECTIONS ALSO REVEALED THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF A LARGE, RELATIVELY STABLE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENT IN TURKISH SOCIETY, AND THAT ELEMENT PROBABLY CONTINUES TO BE THE LARGEST SINGEL VOTING GROUP IN THE COUNTRY. THEREFORE, THE KEY TO THE JUNE 5 ELECTION WILL PROBABLY BE THE EXTENT TO WHICH DEMIREL HAS BEEN ABLE TO RESTORE HIS HOLD ON THE TRADITIONAL VOTER AGAINST THE COMPETION OF ECEVIT AND ERBAKAN.
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